



**Testimony before the Judiciary Committee**

**March 5, 2014**

**HB 5367, AN ACT CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF  
ENHANCED PROTECTIONS AGAINST DISCRIMINATION**

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Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Luis B. Perez and I am the President and CEO of the Mental Health Association of Connecticut, Inc. (MHAC). MHAC was established in 1908, the first private nonprofit dedicated to service, education and advocacy for people experiencing mental health disabilities. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to testify in support of HB 5367, AA Concerning the Implementation of Enhanced Protections Against Discrimination amending Section 1. Section 46a-58 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (Effective October 1, 2014):

- (a) It shall be a discriminatory practice in violation of this section for any person to subject, or cause to be subjected, any other person to the deprivation of any rights, privileges or immunities, secured or protected by the Constitution or laws of this state or of the United States, on account of religion, national origin, alienage, color, race, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, blindness, [or] physical disability **or mental disability.**

The Anti Discrimination Statute creates protected categories on account of religion, national origin, alienage, color, race, sex, gender identity or expression,

sexual orientation, blindness, or physical disability. It does not currently protect persons who are mentally disabled. This omission should be corrected.

The Connecticut Constitution, federal laws including the ADA require persons with mental disabilities be treated the same as persons with physical disabilities. Adopted November 28, 1984, Article fifth of the amendments to the state constitution was amended to ensure that:

**“No person shall be denied the equal protection of the law nor be subjected to segregation or discrimination in the exercise or enjoyment of his or her civil or political rights because of religion, race, color, ancestry, national origin, sex or physical or mental disability.”**

I applaud and wholeheartedly support the concept of protection against discrimination for persons who experience mental disabilities. It is high time that 30 years after the Connecticut Constitution was amended to protect persons with mental disabilities that the law protecting against discrimination be made consistent with our state constitution.

Connecticut has determined it to be good policy that more persons with disabilities be afforded greater opportunities to reside in the community. It only makes sense to support the efforts of those who struggle with a mental disability so often an unseen or invisible disability also be protected from discrimination to make a life in the community a possibility.

The right to be treated equally and to be free from discrimination is essential to make the goal of independent living in the community a reality. The Amendment to this act will further the goal to ensure that all people have equal protection and also recognize the reality that people with mental disabilities may need equal protections to achieve equality.

Thank you.